

Gunnell, E. Tourist robins and waxwings.

(1904)

A-G [Gunnell, E.]  
Tourist Robin  
1904



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TOURIST ROBINS AND WAXWINGS.

BY  
ELIZABETH GRINNELL.

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DISCOVERY OF SAN FRANCISCO BAY AND THE GOLDEN GATE  
BY PORTALA, 1769

*Drawing by Ivory*

## The Two Gates

*By* PERCY MONTGOMERY

Two Golden Gates at eve I see:  
One where the sunset gilds the shore  
And sails half shut within the mists,  
Appear and disappear—  
And yet another far away,  
Amid the realm of memory,  
Where fancies quaint like living things  
Bring faith and hope and cheer.

Two gates at dusk across the west:  
A gate of gold and one of thoughts,  
A way to the sea with all its fears  
And a way to the life of golden years.  
They stretch afar and 'twixt them gleams  
The setting sun across the deep,  
The promise of a glad return,  
Where souls of men are lost in sleep.

There is a way for hearts of gold,  
Framed in this fashion at each dusk,  
Which leads to life and yet beyond  
If we but trust—  
A gate of purpose open wide  
For Youth and Age, if they but know,  
A pathway to the shores beyond,  
If they but will it so.

Dear gates of gold, as o'er the sea  
The fading daylight slips away,  
I bid thee but a moment pause  
That I may see;  
That I may drink thy beauty in,  
May learn thy usage and be bold,  
That in thy arms held safe at last,  
May some day come to thee.

# Tourist Robins and Waxwings

By ELIZABETH GRINNELL

*This is the ninth of a series of studies of the birds of California by Elizabeth Grinnell, of Pasadena, the author, in collaboration with Joseph Grinnell, of "Birds of Song and Story." The illustrations are from photographs from life by the author. The first of these articles, "A California Christmas Carol," appeared in December (1902) SUNSET; the second, beginning "The Story of Anna," in January (1903); the third, continuing "The Story of Anna," in March; the fourth, "A Pair of April Fools," in April; the fifth, "His Excellency, the Mockery," in May; the sixth, "Story of an Oriole's Nest," in July; the seventh, "The Linnet," in August; the eighth, "Home for Thanksgiving," in November.*

THE holidays and new year are sure to bring them, these annual tourists to the sunny south. Somewhere north, in the cool, damp mountains of our border land, they summered. They nested side by side in bush or tree as fancy chose, the main difference in the materials used being a little mud for the robins. Both interlaced sticks

the squirrels and chipmunks and blue-jays, any of which highway robbers are fond of eggs for breakfast.

Now there is a fact concerning robins and waxwings the farmer folk of California overlook, they having an eye mostly to their fruit crops. Said birds eat little else during the long summer months save insect life, feeding the same



*I managed to lay hands on a robin*

of last year's weeds, leaf skeletons from the margin of brooks, and soft fluffy down which had served as wings for certain seed people to travel by.

There might be one more, or one less than four, blue eggs in either nest at last; though for the matter of waxwings and robins being quite sure of a family, it all depended upon outwitting

to their young. The beetles and scale lice may well shiver underneath their brittle shell backs at the whirr of wings, and the crickets and grasshoppers tremble in their boots at the approach of strangers they have learned to despise.

The cedar waxwings are the self-same friends of other days, with the same

velvety ribbon through the eye and cheek, the saucy crest surmounting the coat of fawn tints fading to yellow underneath. And there are the same glistening tips on wings and tail, as if nature had been lavish of her sealing wax when she sent these fluttering missives into all North America. By the time most of the woodsy insects have bundled themselves up in warm nooks for the winter, the robins and waxwings, old and young, strike camp for the south. Of course, like any tourists, on the way they do sample tardy fruits, as who could blame them save the farmer who thinks he wants it all. He forgets the good they have done in the past and throws stones at the wayfarers. Inidentally also he tosses epithets at them, and some shot.

At this end of the line we are waiting for the tourists! For what other reason do we plant pepper trees? These beautiful trees, with their winter festoons of red berries fit for no epicures save the birds, are the pride of the south. We import all sorts of funny beetles to eat up the scale that infests them, and pass ordinances protecting the drooping boughs that fringe our city streets. Some bright morning the trees are alive with flocks of the birds, chattering, singing, swinging, clinging, shaking hailstorms of red berries to the sidewalks and on the heads of pedestrians.

Now let a stranger essay to eat pepper berries and he will make as wry a face as when he samples the olives. He should not set teeth in either. Let a single berry rest on the tongue and he will discover just under the dry skin of it a very sweet and toothsome hint of what the pepper fruit may one day evolve into should a Burbank find time to work his mysterious art upon the individual. This thin sweet meat was placed by nature outside the kernel for the purposes of dissemination. The birds swallow as many whole seeds as they can uneomfortably entertain for the sake of the sweet, when they fly to some distant point to meditate, and incidentally to eject the hard pit of the seeds for which they have no possible use. Often they disgorge them in flight and the traveler thinks himself the subject of some wanton boys in concealment. Standing under a tree in which these

birds have made a settlement it is an amusing sight and sensation to observe the storm of ejected seeds. Everywhere are the pepper seeds thus scattered and the jack-rabbits, who haven't found their way into the canner's kettle, and the ground-squirrels and chipmunks each and all take to covering them up with earth by much scampering and digging; so that we find baby pepper trees in canyons and mesas which for want of moisture seldom live beyond the period of teething. But they *tried* to live which is better than not to make any effort at all, and now and then a full-grown pepper tree is found where plow of man ne'er turned the soil.

From sheer love of walking on the ground, after the manner of robins, these often alight in large flocks and pick up the berries shaken down by the waxwings. I toss them cake and things, and they accept them. Once they discovered the molasses I had set out for the sparrows and sampled the same. They grew fond of it, and a wicked thought occurred to me. I mixed good, wholesome whisky with the molasses, thinking to behold an instructive sight when tipsy robins should lean against the telephone poles, and meander about the yard hicoughing. But never a drop of the mixture would they take, and the precious stuff was wasted—I mean the molasses.

I don a brown cloak and take my seat in the fork of a big pepper tree never to wink nor move a muscle of my face while I behold my friends at nearer view and by innocent deception. They think me a branch of the tree and walk all over me. No gunner could have such fun! The waxwings suspect something wrong with that particular branch, and fly to the apex of a tall walnut devoid of foliage. They sit in long rows on the arms of it, heads all pointing one way, the way of the wind it is supposed, though for the life of me I cannot feel so much as a zephyr. But they have keener nerves, and there they sit lifting their crests, like so many silk hats, to beautiful California. I hasten down and, looking up from beneath the tree, am pelted with the seeds they are done with. Then away they fly to the raspberry row where a few belated berries are waiting for them, and which I do



not grudge my visitors. They spring up and catch the tip of a drooping twig and bear it to the ground with their weight where they hold it with one foot while they strip the red berries from



*A couple of waxwings \* \* \* were picked up unconscious \* \* \* During convalescence they fell in love with their nurse*

the glistening white core. Then they visit the persimmons.

The robins meanwhile are bathing in the fountain created by the drip of a leaky hydrant, or hunting angleworms in the plowed soil, or catching beetle grubs which I toss them. By hook or crook I manage to lay hands on a robin on purpose to get his picture. He objects to being photographed, squealing something about the California state law as to caricatures; but here he is looking resentful. He will not sit nor stand and so his feet are concealed in the captor's hand. He will resume his joyous expression of countenance when once I have opened my hand. Ah, the pleasure of releasing song and glory, and beholding it flit to the pinnacle of an orange tree to pour out its thanks in the rhythm of its own tongue! How immeasurably better than to pick up a dead bird at one's feet and drop it limp and songless into a red-lined bag! The red of the lining may not be uniform, but in spots

only that have the suggestion of blood drops.

Birds often meet with accidents in travel, and when picked up by our emergency ambulance which runs on two feet in place of four wheels, are given a free bed in our hospital with a trained nurse in attendance. A couple of waxwings, intoxicated with their own glee, flew against a telephone wire. They were picked up "unconscious from concussion of the brain," but gradually recovered. During convalescence they fell in love, quite naturally, with their young nurse, evincing a human devotion toward her. In the picture one is preening itself upon her head, while the other rests on her hand. The day after they were photographed they joined their mates in the pepper trees and took an optimistic view of the world.

So let old Boreas blow his cold fingers



A CALIFORNIA WAXWING

in the far mountains, and the cataracts freeze their malice in the teeth of the north wind while the robins and waxwings join the tourist's trail to California.







Laylord Bros.  
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